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## EXPERIENCES OF THE JUSTICE HOSPITAL GROUP, BASE HOSPITAL 51

BY LAURA E. COLEMAN, R.N.

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For nearly a year Lieutenant Colonel Frederick B. Lund of Boston had been forming a Unit of Nurses for Army work overseas, later known as Base Hospital No. 51, and on June 7th, 1918, the present Chief Nurse, a member of the Army Nurse Corps, the Red Cross Nursing Service and Unit No. 51, went for Army experience to U. S. A. Base Hospital, Fox Hills, Staten Island, the large hospital then building to receive our wounded and sick, returning from overseas.

On July 27, orders came to mobilize at Headquarters, in New York. The incoming nurses began to arrive singly, or in little groups, from many camps west and south and even from the states of Washington and California, so that the Unit had the benefit of their various broad experiences in Army nursing. The heat was intense. The baggage of the entire Unit was stored at another mobilization center and was inaccessible, so here we learned our first great lesson in self-denial and endurance, as few had any comforts other than those with which she had travelled for several days. The nurses stood patiently in long lines in the super-heated corridors of the mobilization station, with hundreds of others, waiting for assignment; and on the fifth day all moved to the Mobilization Station at 120 Madison Avenue, each looking after herself as best she might. Here we were at last allowed access to our stored baggage and also found the few remaining members of the Unit.

We were now a full Army Base Hospital Nursing Corps, consisting of Chief Nurse, ninety-nine nurses, and one dietitian, one hundred and one in all.

As soon as all members arrived, we had roll call and decided by vote that we should be a democratic Unit, that in every subject affecting the good name or general comfort of Unit No. 51, the majority should rule, the Chief Nurse giving the final vote. Each nurse pledged herself to this ruling, and to this form of government can be attributed, in part, the great happiness each member of the Unit has had in her service. At no time, in any matter, has there been anything but the greatest generosity of spirit, the more fortunate sharing gladly the discomforts of those less fortunately situated.

From now on began our intensive training; with breakfast three blocks away, eating hurriedly to make way for the next group to

breakfast after us, rushing to the Armory for military drill and, after an hour's stiff drill, standing for a half-hour to sing the songs that might cheer our boys "over there."

Our instructors were military and full of zeal and enthusiasm, so we, having entered the Army proud to serve, and anxious to acquit ourselves as true soldiers, tried to rise to their expectations. I fear we failed in that, but not a nurse faltered till, from sheer weariness, she must needs drop out, and as this was bad form, it was indeed rarely done.

Then followed a rush to photographers for passport pictures, to tailors to fit street uniforms, service uniforms, great coats and rain coats; a hurried lunch, and then, despite the heat, on they went again for identification discs, boots, three pairs at least, rubber boots, and trunks of proper specifications; to the Red Cross Outfitting Department for further equipment, a full day always, with perhaps a call to sing, as a group of nurses, at a reunion in the evening, before some Unit sailed.

One memorable day was that of the dedication of our flag, at old St. Paul's, at four p. m. on August 16. The entire Unit accompanied by Lt. Reid, musical instructor, and Lt. Dale, military leader, with our friends who braved the heat, met for Holy Communion and to pledge our Unit to the service. The flag of Unit No. 55, also from Boston, was dedicated at the same time, and if the new discomforts undergone had at any time dampened our ardor, the inspiration of this consecration removed all doubt and renewed our zeal. With the Clergy leading, followed by our beautiful flag, borne aloft by one of the Unit, we marched in twos around the close of old St. Paul's, a truly inspiring spectacle; two hundred devoted nurses in all, fully equipped for their chosen work, for it is to the credit of all nurses that the Army Nurse Corps was the only branch of the military service which was entirely voluntary.

After several weeks of this intensive life, we had a grand muster at the Armory, of nine hundred and more nurses ready for orders, each group singing its original songs; songs that identified them with their Unit, the first stanza of one of the songs of Unit No. 51 being:

We're a Boston Unit going out,  
To help to beat the Kaiser;  
And when we've finished up our work,  
He'll sadder be and wiser.

which was sung to the stirring tune of Yankee Doodle.

On August 23, came an advance order to be ready, so the last shoe was fitted, the last bedding roll strapped and tagged, the last

recalcitrant trunk closed with many a sigh over the cosy articles, formerly considered necessities, which had to be discarded from a regulation military trunk. Just before sailing, one nurse received word that her brother, serving with the British Army, had been killed. This brought very close to us the real object of our mission and fortified our courage. That night as we met at Roll Call and each responded to her name, every eye was bright with the hope that to-morrow would be the great day, as indeed it was.

On August 24, came orders to proceed to the Port of Embarkation. At the Armory we had been drilled "squads right, squads left" and every other formation by which we might be called upon to march away and aboard ship, so that with the eyes of our trained officers and enlisted men upon us, we could so acquit ourselves as to prove to them that we also were soldiers worthy of a place in our great Army; but alas for human expectations! We left our Mobilization Station in little groups of ten or more, by street cars, to tell no one our destination, and to ask no one how to arrive at our prospective point,—a boat with a cabalistic number, at a pier also numbered.

This was of course for our protection, but the heat was so intense and all were so tired, that in their zeal to obey, several groups were lost en route, finally arriving worn, tired, drooping and thirsty, and after long delay all straggled aboard the troop-ship *France IV*. We were a bit disappointed at this inglorious ending to our long and severe training, but we were not dismayed.

Our convoy, consisting of the *France IV*, *Agamemnon* and *Mt. Vernon*, left the New York pier August 25, and we arrived at Brest September 4, at a most momentous time in the history of America's part in the war.

For three days out from New York harbor, and for two days before entering Brest, the nurses were ranged beside their life boats from four-thirty a. m. until the cold gray dawn gave way to day, as these were the hours of greatest danger from submarines. Sick or well, they were there, with rarely a murmur. They learned the sound of our guns firing at a submarine, but were unafraid. They proved themselves good soldiers in all the trials and discomforts of a crowded ship, and upon arrival at Pontanezan Barracks, where three hundred nurses from our convoy landed at once, soon made themselves comfortable in camps of forty each, lighted only by a single lantern. They quickly adjusted themselves to scarcity of water and military restrictions, but here our first sorrow came, as two nurses were seriously ill, and our ranks were decimated by influenza, eleven having to be left behind temporarily, when we marched away.

At 4 a. m., September 7, we left Pontanezan Barracks for Brest,

to entrain for Toul in the active Lorraine Sector, carrying orders for equipment of gas masks and helmets. All were in open trucks, and the rain poured mercilessly on us and our exposed baggage, but none complained.

The previous night the Chief Nurse had ordered rations for a three days' journey and these were distributed in second and third class railway cars, many of them with broken windows and several with no cushions, due to the exigencies of the war. It looked a bit hopeless at first, but as little groups adjusted themselves, the dismay passed, and after four days we finally arrived at Toul at three a. m. of the fourth night. During this time the nurses had hot food but twice, had no opportunity to lie down, and had depended for water of any kind on the occasional friendly pump or hydrant at a railway station.

Very tired, but still cheerful, in black darkness we entered the unlighted ambulances which swayed through the dark and muddy streets of Toul and brought us to Base Hospital No. 51 of the Justice Hospital Group. Here we were greeted by a real breakfast, served in a military stable lighted by an occasional candle, and the heartiness of the welcome made up for much of the weariness. All took a few hours' rest and then went on duty, as there were already two hundred and forty-six patients in the hospital, nine hundred and seventy-seven, having already been well cared for by our staff and corps men, before the arrival of the nurses.

That day they nursed the sick, learned where the *abri* was, how to distinguish the sound of a German aeroplane from a French or American plane and went to bed, forty-five in a ward, lighted only by a single candle, for a much needed rest.

The Chief Nurse and her assistant were asked to sleep near the door so that they could be easily wakened should the hospital be bombed by hostile aeroplanes, and that night the purr of our first Boche plane greeted us. One or two curious ones went to the windows to locate it, but neither it, nor the pop of the "contra-avion guns" which lined the surrounding hills, caused a quiver of fear.

After midnight, however, on the early morning of September 12, all were simultaneously wakened by the coming of the great drive of St. Mihiel. The flame of the barrage lighted the windows and the buildings vibrated to the shock, as the great guns boomed their message to the Hun. No one was frightened, yet all understood how near we were to the battle line. They rested until morning, knowing that soon their sad duties would begin. No reveille was needed to call them, however, for each was up early and hurriedly went to her post to make every possible preparation for the wounded who must soon arrive.

At seven-thirty a. m. came orders telling us to send, at eight a. m., forty nurses to help out more needy hospitals. Then a second order followed to send forward four surgical nurses as special operating teams. With those left at Brest, and two ill in Base Hospital No. 51 from the hardships of travel, the active nursing force was now reduced to the Chief Nurse, forty-two nurses and a dietitian.

Despite the fact that our baggage car had been detached near Orleans and we did not get it for a month, many went forward in street uniforms, and without delay the ambulances bore them to their new and unknown field.

In the late afternoon the wounded began to arrive, and into the night and all night, lines of ambulances, in pouring rain and almost impenetrable darkness, crawled to our doors and were unloaded on stretchers into wards and corridors, met always by physicians and nurses, the most needy going directly to the surgery, where again nurses were ready for their part of the work.

Because of the rain there was less danger from Hun planes, so we had candle light in the wards and this made it easier to see to work. Electricity was being installed, having so far been in the surgery only, but when the "Alerte" sounded, electricity was cut off at Toul; then admissions, operations, and nursing proceeded by candle light only.

On the night of September 14, a steady stream of our wounded poured into the hospital through the receiving ward, pre-operative wards and surgery, all except those brought in for immediate transfer to the surgery, being now greeted with hot chocolate, or coffee and cigarettes, as these boys were not only wounded, but weary, hungry and cold.

The work had added difficulties now, however, for the night was clear and a hostile plane might locate us if our lights were seen. The ward and corridor windows were not yet covered by heavy shades so that when Boche planes flew over the hospital and the guards went about shouting "Lights out!" out they went, and doctors, nurses and stretcher-bearers stumbled about among the patients in the darkness, illuminated only by a tiny shaded candle, and often no light at all.

For four terrible days and nights this work went on unceasingly; the wounded who could be moved being evacuated to Bases farther back to make room for those who continued to come in, until the wards were overflowing. The small corps of forty-two nurses seemed to be everywhere; feeding the hungry, warming the cold, cheering the dying, caring for their valuables and lighting cigarettes. No work was too great, none too little to receive their thoughtful attention. Their energy and tenderness seemed unbounded. They never stopped

except to drop down for short rests when unable to go longer, a less tired one replacing the other.

At last the hospital was full, the big drive had been successful, and our admissions grew fewer, so that the chief nurse and nurses were able to go to meals regularly and review and systematize the work. The lull was short, however, though seventeen of the nurses sent forward to assist at other hospitals, returned, and then two units of twenty-two and twenty-six each came to us, to await orders to proceed to the new area of operation.

The nursing force was, therefore, one hundred and seven for five days and this gave our tired nurses a chance to rest, organize teams to work in relays in the Carrell-Dakin dressing wards, and prepare a schedule; also to properly equip departments only temporarily ready.

At 9 a. m. on September 25 these forty-eight nurses with three of Base Hospital No. 51, proceeded to Souilly for the great Argonne drive. They went forward under sealed orders, proceeding in ambulances, attracting as little attention as possible; each ambulance twenty minutes later than the other, lest a spying aeroplane should mark their way and destination.

On September 26 began the memorable offensive of the Argonne, and soon lines of ambulances crawled to the receiving door, while all movable patients were being evacuated to army trains to make room for the newly wounded. Now, however, the nursing work was organized. All windows were covered by black shades so that we were able to have plenty of candle light even when the "Alerte" sounded, and therefore could the more easily care for our patients.

No one seeing it can ever forget the joy on the faces of our wounded as they were greeted with hot food, a smile, and a kindly word. It was a marvel to me how the nurses stood the continued strain. Post-operative work in the wards, where Carrell-Dakin treatment was given to severe cases needing it, was enough to strike terror to the strongest hearts. There were wounds such as in civil life one had never dreamed could exist and the patient still live, yet these young women went on with their work like veterans, stopping only when all was done, early or late, and at first it was always late, for during the first few weeks the work was interminable.

Still, after the first week, the nurses individualized their patients and could tell me as I made rounds, the little interesting, pathetic touches and the personal wishes of their sickest ones, which I am proud to say were never overlooked.

Shall I ever forget how deeply I was touched, when, after about five weeks of this steady, soul-stirring work, the nurses planned a

dance, our first recreation at Base Hospital No. 51? The long-hoped-for sitting room was a reality, thanks to our generous and thoughtful Red Cross Captain and a friend in Boston, who gave us a piano, but a convoy of wounded came in, and those wonderful nurses came to me and told me they wished to postpone the dance until later, as it seemed wrong, even for those off-duty, to dance while so many were suffering.

It was a wonderful dance, that first one, for by great effort a tent had been set up, joining our main quarters and mess hall, and lighted by electricity, the electrical work being done by a grateful convalescent soldier.

There was a slight lull along the battle line so that many of our military friends were able to be with us, and I can but feel that its great success was a well-merited reward for the unselfishness and thoughtfulness shown by the nurses to our wounded.

So constantly did patients from St. Mihiel, Montsec, Seicheprey, Fliry, Thiaucourt (along the Hindenburg line), Verdun and the Argonne come in, and go out, that Base Hospital No. 51 continued to be an evacuation hospital rather than a base hospital up to that memorable November 11, 1918.

After the armistice there began to drift in to us ex-prisoners of war, mainly English and Russian,—ragged, unwashed and sick,—some by ambulance, many on foot. To greet them kindly, to feed them properly, to nurse them tenderly, was a new inspiration, and all threw themselves into the work with renewed energy.

Thanksgiving Day, 1918, will never be forgotten by hundreds of patients and all the personnel of the hospital. The sounds of battle had ceased and all seemed imbued with the true spirit of thanksgiving. A wonderful, real American Thanksgiving dinner was served to everyone. About two hundred ex-prisoners of war, some arriving from Germany that very noon, had their first full meal for months and even years. The nurses donned white uniforms and waited on every patient. Bed patients were fed first, then those able to sit up were placed at daintily decorated tables and cared for by floor nurses on duty. All off-duty nurses and night nurses waited upon those fed in mess hall, who sat down to appropriately laid tables of excellent food and plenty of it, while above all hung the nurses' beautiful flag, at which each ex-prisoner came to salute, their reverential glances seeming to say, "The flag that set us free."

Then these untiring nurses, wishing to show to our enlisted personnel their gratitude for the splendid work they also had done, and to thank them for their loyal coöperation in caring for the sick and wounded, elected to serve them also; so at tables as nearly like



those mother would have at home, as the nurses could make them, they ate their Thanksgiving dinner, served by their friends, the nurses.

Through the thoughtfulness of a friend in Massachusetts, many dainties were added to the nurses' dinner and all ended the day a very happy body of young women.

The nursing history of Base Hospital No. 51 would be incomplete without mention of the influenza epidemic. Almost without warning they came, hundreds of our men from the front lines, the mud still on their clothing. The hospital was already full, but Lieutenant Colonel Tucker, our resourceful Commanding Officer, turned the artillery stables into temporary hospitals, sixty beds in each. Beds, mattresses, pillows and blankets appeared as if by magic, thanks to the foresight of our energetic Quartermaster.

Those long lines of ambulances seemed never to grow less, a dozen always in line, waiting to have patients unloaded. The nurses forgot their weariness and off-duty hours. Captain Earnest W. Whitcomb of the American Red Cross furnished clothing and comforts to the limit of his stores, and Annie Wheeler, the Red Cross Home Secretary, closed her office, and side by side with the chief nurse and nurses, helped to warm, feed and care for these cold, weary, hungry, sick men.

"Walkers" were taken to a hastily arranged canteen and our indefatigable mess officer and dietitian kept such stores of hot food ready, that all were happily fed, the nurses taking command of the serving of the food, and working steadily for hours in the cold.

Then began the acute nursing care, about ten per cent of our nursing force also succumbing to influezna, because they were now very weary and susceptible to infection. Such self-denial I have rarely seen; such noble cheerfulness I never expect to see again. Many of our brave soldiers passed to the great Beyond, cheered to the last by the faithful nurse, so buoyed by her courage, tender care and optimism that he scarcely realized the end was near.

Christmas was indeed a memorable day. It rained in the early morning but nothing daunted, all day nurses donned raincoats, sou'westers, and rubber boots; then they and their grateful convalescent officer patients, carrying lighted candles, sang carols in every ward, and cheered many a homesick lad.

The wards were prettily decorated with holly, mistletoe, ivy and Christmas trees, by convalescent patients, nurses and corps.

The dinner for all was a repetition of that of Thanksgiving. Then nurses and personnel had their Christmas trees and were in turn remembered by a thoughtful friend in Massachusetts, who, through Lieutenant Colonel Harry W. Goodall, former Chief of Medical Staff

of Base Hospital No. 51, sent each a Christmas greeting and an appropriate gift.

From now on we continued busy, though gradually all surgical patients were evacuated and Base Hospital No. 51 became a medical hospital, its capacity being reduced to one thousand patients.

At midnight on March 31, 1919, Base Hospital No. 51 ceased to operate but faithful nurses remained on duty a day longer to see the last patients transferred.

More than thirteen thousand patients had been cared for by the nurses at Base Hospital No. 51, in addition to the work done in five other evacuation hospitals, some under shrapnel along the battle line, in army train service carrying the sick and wounded to hospitals farther back, or to base ports for home, and in helping at other hospitals in our own Justice Hospital Group. One Nurse of Base Hospital No. 51, is still Acting Chief Nurse at an evacuation hospital in Germany with the Army of Occupation.

When the history of this great war is written, let us hope to these young women, many of them fresh from their training schools, many of whom had made sacrifices financially and physically, will be given the honor they so richly deserve. Their mission was to serve, they served willingly and gloriously and as their Chief Nurse, I am grateful to have had the honor of serving with them.

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## PRE-HOSPITAL TRAINING FOR NURSES

BY W. G. CHRISTIAN, M.D.

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For a long time I have thought the present system of instructing nurses both unjust and inadequate; but as any suggestion from the author of nurses' text books might be considered self-advertising, I have hesitated to write on the subject. A sentence in an otherwise favorable review of a little work by Dr. Haskell and the writer, has induced the belief that the importance of the subject should be considered rather than any adverse criticism to which I may subject myself.

In all the hospitals with which I have been acquainted, instruction in the fundamental branches of Anatomy, gross and microscopic, Chemistry, and Physiology, has been given by busy practitioners having no special knowledge of the subject taught, by nurses who have graduated under similar conditions, or by undergraduate medical students, perhaps the best prepared of the three, but taught by all from inadequate texts, and nearly or entirely without demonstration. This is peculiarly true of gross anatomy, partly because it is